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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses role expectations of principals, including the importance of the principal role, pressures and difficulties associated with it, and the problem of conflicting role expectations. (Author/LD)

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- DRAFT OUTLINE -

The Principalship: Role Expectation and Leadership Style

by

E.N. Gould

I: Importance of the Principalship Role

The principal is the most important and influential single person in the school system. This is not to downgrade the importance of any other position - not that of Superintendent, nor anyone else in this sometimes painful hierarchy that has grown up in education. Some would argue that the teacher is the most important person; that it is in the classroom that the action occurs. Well they are right in saying that that is where the action is. But the teacher's influence is limited to the students he meets and by other factors within the school.

The principal, more than any other person, can affect what goes on in his school, can set the tone, can manipulate his human resources and other resources in the most effective manner, can challenge and innovate and stimulate; in short, is in the one position to exert basic, grass-roots leadership.

It is true that a principal can only work with what he has in respect to quality of staff, type of student body, kinds of facilities. But what a difference he can make in the results he gets from these resources! It has been suggested that in a school with all "good" teachers the principal can just sit back and let the school operate. The teachers in your school may all be excellent. But they need to be pulled together for a common purpose. Appropriate team work and "esprit des corps" need to be developed, and this is a function of the principal. Under a poor principal even the best teachers may lose their initiative, their enthusiasm, their spark.

The principal, then, has more direct influence on more people who truly affect the teaching-learning process than any other single person.

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II: Pressures and Difficulties Associated with the Principalship

Having established the importance of the position, let's look briefly at some of the pressures on it. Few persons in any occupation have to contend with the pressures from such a diversity of "publics": boards of education, students, teachers, parents, taxpayers, community, governments - and all are overlapping and interdependent, but frequently conflicting. One of the most frustrating aspects of these pressures is their inconsistency. As we shall note this morning, it is in the area of conflicting expectations that this inconsistency manifests itself. An individual may exert one kind of pressure as a parent and the same individual exert quite different, conflicting pressure as a taxpayer.

Of course, there are other pressures on principals, some of which may be traced to relatively recent developments such as:

New staffing patterns
Teacher militancy and unions
Student unrest
Public demands for "accountability"
and
Centralization trends.

III: Role and Role Expectations - Definitions

Now role could be defined simply as the functions accepted as necessary to a position. But bear in mind that these functions are determined by expectations for the role - expectations held by the incumbent and expectations held by every other person in the "role network". It is the expectations that are important, and I define expectations as "an evaluative standard applied to an incumbent of a position".

IV: The Problem of Conflicting Role Expectations

Every one of us has many roles to play. We have personal roles, family roles, social roles, professional roles, and each impinges on the others. Further, for any one of these roles there are various and differing expectations. If you are a principal - and excluding any expectations for you as a man, woman, a colleague, a father, a coach, an adult, an employee, - as a principal certain expectations are held for you by yourself, other principals, your teachers, your students, parents, the general public, the school board, the Superintendent, the building Superintendent, etc., etc. And the joy of it all, of course, is that many, many of these various and varying expectations conflict.

I have been interested for some time in a specific aspect of this problem. It is the problem posed by principals and teachers holding differing expectations for the role of the principalship. It is my view that there is a tendency among principals to assume that their expectations for their role and their teachers' expectations coincide to a considerable degree - notwithstanding any studies indicating the contrary. I feel that periodically the principal is surprised by a situation that points up the likelihood that such expectations differ significantly - indeed, that they frequently conflict.

The implications of differing expectations are obvious in respect to difficulties in communication, interpersonal friction and the like. As I have mentioned it appears to me that the problem becomes more significant as the organizational structures and decision-making mechanisms of public schools undergo change. There is no doubt that these changes pose a particular challenge for the school principal which makes it essential that principals try to be aware of the expectations that their teachers hold for them. The first step in achieving such awareness involves the identification of the expectations: then, an assessment of the degree to which they are held, and some recognition of the factors that influence the strength become important.

V: An Analysis of Role Expectations for Principals in Fifteen Suburban High Schools in Quebec - A study completed in 1972.

For those reasons, several years ago, I conducted a study of role expectations for the High School Principal as held by principals and their teachers in 15 high schools in four suburban school districts in Greater Montreal. I feel the findings of this research are still pertinent and are applicable to most typical school systems in the U.S. and Canada. I would welcome a replication study to verify this view.

Among other things, the study showed five general areas where principals and their teachers disagreed significantly and sometimes seriously, as to the principal's role.

They were:

(i) The "buffer function" that principals have long held between their teaching staff on the one hand, and pupils, parents, school boards on the other.

(ii) The issue of academic freedom for teachers.

(iii) Professional competency of teachers.

(iv) The principal's place in teacher negotiations.

(v) Finally, a category concerning "political" behaviours of principals.

Incidently, it is interesting to note that teachers as a group showed much more consensus in their expectations for the principal's role than did principals themselves.

VI: Role Expectations and Leadership Style

If the literature on the subject of role conflict and its relation to leadership points up any one major conclusion, it is that expectations for the leader need to be both appropriate and compatible with the leader's expectations for his own role if effective leadership is to occur. In other words, if principals are to be accepted as leaders in their schools, they must fulfil - insofar as possible - the expectations of their teachers. The study that I conducted in suburban Montreal indicated a number of serious discrepancies in this regard.

This leads us to the significance of the matter of differing expectations to the Principal's leadership style.

The concept of role and role expectation that we have been referring to provide a dimension through which administration has been studied. You probably all recall the parallel relationships on the normative and personal dimensions as illustrated by Getzels and Guba. You remember: The institutional roles and expectations in the nomothetic dimension that lead to institutional goal behaviour; that is, effectiveness; and the parallel individual's personality and need dispositions on the idiographic dimension that affect efficiency.

And you remember the views of most authorities that, in order to promote both efficiency and effectiveness within the organization, the administrator must strive for a balance between the personality attributes and the role expectations of all members of the organization. And most of us would agree that leadership that emphasizes either dimension at the expense of the other will likely be successful. So I advocate the "transactional" type of leadership that Getzels and Guba modelled.

This transactional posture requires a constant sensitivity to role confusion, role ambiguity, and - our topic - role conflicts.

VII: Earlier, I mentioned the importance of developing an awareness of the part of the role incumbent of the expectations for his role held by others. How does the principal gain this awareness on a day by day basis, without conducting studies and validating questionnaires? He asks! He questions a dozen times a day, in a dozen different formal and informal ways, what differences might exist in expectations for his role. The greatest step toward this awareness is simply a sensitivity to the fact that expectations for our role held by others almost certainly differ from ours and may very well conflict. We must consciously develop our perceptiveness.

Some conflicts in expectations simply cannot <u>be</u> resolved. Of course we <u>cannot</u> adapt our behaviours to satisfy everyone's expectations - even if we wanted to! Very early in my remarks I emphasized the problem of varied, varying and conflicting expectations. Of course we cannot accommodate them all, bring them all to a match. An awareness of - and a sensitivity to - the conflicting expectations is the main thing to strive for. Secondly, and particularly in terms of those with whom you work closely - your teachers - when you become aware of conflicting expectations, put your cards on the table. Point out that you are aware of certain expectations that you simply cannot meet "for the following reasons". What I am saying is: failing major co-incidence of expectations on the part of principal and teachers, a clear awareness of both sides of the differences and possible reasons for them is important.

Many conflicts in expectations for the principalship may and should be resolved by the exertion of the principal's <u>authority</u>.

VII: cont'd.....

There are two sources of authority. These are:

1. Legal - that is "official" handed down or delegated by the formal organization.

2. Authority derived from the social set through recognition of the leader's competency and abilities. It is "earned" authority. It is evaluative. It is based on the degree to which role expectations are met.

   If any one conclusion emerges clearly from a century of study of administration, it is that reliance on the former (legal authority) to the exclusion of the latter (earned authority) is rank folly. Even the last bastions of "legal" or "institutional" authority and the hierarchical system - the church and the military - are crumbling in this regard.

So it is this awareness, this perceptiveness, this recognition of kinds of authority, that characterize the transactional leader.